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ABSTRACT

Ways in which women practice power in the central office and the perceptions of those practices are explored in this study. The paper raises the questions: "How can a woman be perceived as successful in a central-office administrative position?" "How is success defined by those with whom she works?" and "What do her colleagues accept as successful behaviors, attitudes, and actions?" After a review of success and socialization issues, the study methodology is explained. Data were collected in two school districts in two midwestern U.S. cities. The subjects included five women who are central-office administrators but are not superintendents. To secure data, open-ended interviews and "non-interviews" were combined with information secured from the women's coworkers. The results suggest that the collaborative, consensus-building process typical of these women was valued by most of the respondents. The women placed importance on outcomes secured as a result of one's efforts, and all agreed that having good interpersonal skills was essential. It was found that upper echelon women administrators were more likely to be accepted in districts where the superintendent delegated full organizational power to the women. Other findings are reported. (RJM)

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Women Administrators and Qualities of Success: A Newly Defined Partnership

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-- I feel as if I am successful. When you imply that I am not successful, it hurts. I'm a hard worker. I am dedicated. I'm experienced and intelligent. I have made things happen. I've influenced people, helped them to accept new ideas and try new things. I do a good job. I really am making a difference.

--The good ole boys won't <u>let</u> you be successful.

-- I don't agree. There isn't a good old boys' network anymore, or at least not much of one.

-- But, there are people out there who say you're too directive (too indecisive, too obnoxious, not directive enough, too talkative, too emotional). They say you haven't had enough experience at the school level and you spend too much time on process (you ignore the process and do what you want).

-- That may be, but I see those characteristics in both women and men. I just don't believe there are any differences in males or females and what they have to do to be successful. In the end, it doesn't make that much difference. Good work exceeds all.

(A composite)

As our study drew to a close and the data began to take over, it became evident that the women we had been studying earnestly believe that they are successful. Their spirits seem indomitable. Their thoughts are perceptive and their words persuasive. The women are bright, articulate, and have previously thought through many of the issues dealt with in this study. They appear assured, competent, and savvy. They make no gendered allowances for themselves. They are willing to discuss the concepts of success and power and how gender relates to those two. They state that in the past, gender issues strongly influenced women's success and power in the field of educational administration. However, they believe that there are "some image issues that are...disappearing or

diminishing that...are just based on stereotypes and past knowledge" (subject #4). Additionally, the women feel that they have been able to get past those gender issues that "might" have existed.

Our study was designed and carried out because we had profound, unanswered questions about success as it relates to women central office administrators who are in positions other than the superintendency. One of us had been involved in previous research examining the ways in which women administrators wield power and what effect that has on other people's perceptions of those women. Both of us had thought about women administrators and how others judge their success primarily because of our own experiences in central office positions. We wanted to try to understand more about our questions and possible answers.

The Questions

What is success? What does it mean to be successful in an organization? Is success defined only as seen through the eyes and perceptions of others? Or is a person's success more aptly defined by the person herself? Is success defined differently by women than it is by men? Is the success of women central office administrators judged by a different set of standards than those used to judge others? Does the concept of success differ from person to person or is there general consensus on the characteristics of success needed for any position? How does power relate to success? Does the way women practice power impact the way other people view her? Are their perceptions of her different than they would be of a man who practiced power in the same manner?

These are some of the questions that emerged and challenged us as we set about attempting to understand the factors that contribute to district employees' perceptions of the success of women administrators in central office. Specifically, we wanted to better understand the impact of feminine socialization on the success of women district level administrators as it is perceived by those with whom they work. Therefore, this study was designed to address the particular questions: How can a woman be perceived as successful

in a central office administrative position? How is success defined by those with whom she works? What do her colleagues accept as successful behaviors, attitudes, and actions? Are the characteristics for success shaped by gender socialization?

What Do Others Say About Success and Socialization Issues?

There are many definitions of success. According to Webster's dictionary (1993), success is a favorable or desired outcome, the attainment of wealth, favor, or eminence. Among the assumptions of Adlerian psychology is that successful human beings are constantly striving toward self-selected goals. Simply defined, then, success has to do with the achievement of goals and these goals vary with the individual (Northcutt, 1991). Success is also broadly defined as "any achievement in the personal, interpersonal, or academic/occupational domains which a person regards as a success" (Canavan-Gumpert, Garner, and Gumpert, 1978, p. 26).

Northcutt (1991) more specifically defines career success for women as recognition and reward by others. Although Kundsin (1973) accepts as successful those women who have been recognized by their peers as having top administrative posts, she also suggests that a definition of success should include an inner sense of identity, worth, and self-esteem as a person, without reference to career accomplishments or money.

Northcutt (1991), in a review of the literature, indicates that among common characteristics of successful career women are hard work, perseverance, commitment to their careers, and general career goals. In addition, women in male-dominated professions (such as educational administration) are more aggressive, independent, self-confident, autonomous, and unconventional than those in other professions. The book, Breaking the Glass Ceiling (1992), deals with a study of the perceptions of senior executives. The results of the study indicate that any successful executive woman has at least a few of the following major success factors:

- help from above
- a track record of achievements

- desire to succeed
- ability to manage subordinates
- willingness to take career risks
- ability to be tough, decisive and demanding (p. 24)

Gender Socialization and Success

I think that if I were to list one quality which all truly successful women now have in common, it would be their femininity...they have succeeded largely because they have brought womanly quickness, sensitivity and understanding to jobs where it was needed.... They are ...successful because they have found a place for their talents as women in the world." (Taves, 1943)

Duncan (1993) suggested that the socialization of female administrators as women or as "feminine" has a significant amount of influence on female administrative behavior. Other studies indicate that women administrators, successful or not, are constrained by cultural definitions of appropriate behavior (Marshall, 1980; LaBella and Leach, 1983; Horner, 1970; Brunner and Duncan, 1994). Langford, in a review of the literature on gender differences in school administration, states that "women are more successful in being perceived as a successful leader if they establish authority in a less authoritative way than men and emphasize their concern for cohesiveness and interrelatedness" 1993, p. 15).

Women and men are sometimes viewed as different and unequal in many ways, with the characteristics and behavior associated with men frequently more valued than characteristics associated with women (Northcraft and Gutek, 1993; Kanter, 1977; LaBella and Leach, 1983). Additionally, culturally defined roles can create "invisible" expectations for both genders. As a result, it is possible that those in the workplace might possess, perhaps quite subconsciously, different perceptions about what is considered successful behavior for women administrators and what is considered successful behavior for men

administrators. Griffin (1992) demonstrated that people perceive as successful those managers whose leadership styles closely followed gender stereotypes: males were rated more positively when they were authoritative and females were rated more positively when they were participative. Such participative behavior is perceived by many as "gender-appropriate" or a feminine characteristic (Tavris, 1992; Gilligan, 1982; Belenky et al., 1986; Porat, 1991; Haring-Hidore et al., 1990; Pigford and Tonnsen, 1993; Whitaker and Lane, 1990; Schuster and Foote, 1990; Brunner, 1993; Brunner and Duncan, 1994).

In addition, people bring to the workplace a sense of gender so deeply rooted that patterns are noted as absolute differences rather than culturally mediated differences (Tannen, 1994). Tannen (1994) states that "(m)ore women or men learn to speak particular ways *because* those ways are associated with their own gender. And individual men or women who speak in ways associated with the other gender will pay a price for departing from cultural expectations" (pp. 15-16). Belenky et al (1986) cite extensive research on such culturally mediated gender differences indicating that girls and women find it more difficult than boys and men to assert their authority or to even consider themselves as authorities or as successful in their field.

Realistically, women who wish to become successful administrators almost have to accept cultural prescriptions for "appropriate", or feminine, behavior (Curcio, Morsink, and Bridges, 1989; Offerman and Armitage, 1993), while developing the skills necessary to gain entry into the male-dominant culture of school administration (Pigford and Tonnsen, 1993; LaBella and Leach, 1983). In other words, the successful woman central office administrator needs to acquire the skills--that is, the ways of talking, ways of dressing, ways of interacting, and ways of acting--necessary for success in the dominant culture while still validating her own identity and self-esteem (Duncan, 1995).

Research Objectives

This study was designed to explore the questions: How can a woman be perceived as successful in a central office administrative position? How is success defined by those with whom she works? What do her colleagues accept as successful behaviors, attitudes, and actions? The results of the study not only provide some understanding of these questions, but also provide a framework for women working in the central office or considering a move to central office--it gives some indications of what a woman can (or should) do in order to be considered successful as a central office administrator. The results also indicate what type of environment supports the perception that women central office administrators are successful.

Research Methods

The understandings of career success presented in this paper emerge as a result of data collected in two school districts located in two mid-western cities. One district educates approximately 9000 students and the other enrolls over 16,000. The community in which the larger district is located has been growing rapidly for at least ten years. This growth is mainly attributed to the steady and rapid influx of residents from a nearby large metropolitan area. The smaller district's community has also had steady growth, but at a much slower pace. It is located between two large metropolitan areas but at a greater distance from them. Both of the communities remain small enough that there is still only one public school district in each city.

The subjects of the study are five women who are in central office administrative positions other than that of the superintendency (two of the women are in one district and three are employed in the other district). The female administrative subjects were selected opportunistically, but also purposively because their circumstances in the two districts were quite similar: there are at least two women in the upper echelon administrative positions in

both districts. This choice was an attempt on the part of the researchers to avoid the token, isolated female central office administrator (although it could be argued that two and three are still token numbers). All five women were placed in their positions as a direct result of district reorganization which had been undertaken by each superintendent in an effort to "flatten the organization". In district A the women were placed in newly-created positions. In district B the women were selected for both newly-created and newly-defined positions. All five women were "insiders" (already employed in their respective districts before moving to central office), although two had only been in the district five years before assuming a central office position. The others had been in their respective districts twelve, fifteen, and sixteen years before moving into a district-level administrative position. All five women have earned their doctorates. Four of the women are in their late 40's or early 50's and one of the women is in her early 40's.

The descriptive, qualitative field study relied on participant observation, open-ended interviews (using a series of very broad guiding questions), and "non-interviews" (conversations centering on the issues of the study, as described by Lancy, 1993). The five women were first interviewed using broad guiding questions. Two of the women were observed in several different settings. Other informants were women and men who have worked directly with the five women mentioned above. These ten other informants (five from each district) were selected using a combination of strategic sampling and purposive sampling. They were teachers, principals, classified personnel, coordinators, and district office administrators. The ten informants were also interviewed using broad guiding questions. At different points during the collection, analysis, and interpretation of the data, "non-interviews" were held with the five women in a sense of "reciprocity...give and take, a mutual negotiation of meaning and power" (Lather, 1991, p. 57). This negotiation of meaning involved the "recycling of description, emerging analysis and conclusions" to the five women administrators (Lather, 1991, p. 61). Their reactions to the

data were helpful in guiding the researchers' reflections on the themes emerging from the study and in shaping the analysis and reporting of the findings.

To analyze the data, we read, reflected on, and re-read the notes over and over again. From this reflective, collaborative, and hermeneutical process, we inferred the nature of the effect of gender and socialization on the attributes of success and power in these women central office administrators as perceived by others. As the data emerged, we found that others' perceptions of these administrators were shaped by their own "culturally mediated" expectations, by their views of how women should act, and by the very culture or climate of the district in which these women work.

The theoretical perspective which underlies this study is that much of existing administrative theory is androcentric or male-centered in nature, and therefore is not relevant to women administrators' needs, not of value to them, and can even be detrimental to their purposes and their well-being. Shakeshaft (1987) explains that educational theories or organizational concepts developed within this androcentric framework are a result of imbalanced and inaccurate research and are not representative of the female paradigm. Although a research base centered around female administrators is taking shape, there is very little work focused on the woman administrator as a central office director or assistant superintendent. Thus, this study adds a relevant piece to existing knowledge in educational research and provides an opportunity for the improvement of practice for women in central office.

How Do I Define Success? Let Me Count the Ways

There are no secrets to success. It is the result of preparation, hard work, learning from failure.

General Colin L. Powell in The Black Collegian

If one were to look at the women administrators who were the subjects of this study through a certain lens--the lens generally applied in business and industry-- one would certainly say the women were successful. They would be considered successful in part simply by virtue of the fact they had acceded to administrative positions in the district office, positions that are usually considered to be acquisitions of success. They have titles like assistant superintendent, executive director, and division director. They all sit on the superintendent's cabinet in their respective districts and they are all directly involved in decision making that affects the entire district. All of them report directly to their respective superintendent. Furthermore, they would be considered successful because each of them has achieved her doctorate.

They would also be deemed successful because they had achieved positions of relative power and authority before claiming district office administrative responsibilities. Four of the five women had been school principals before becoming central office administrators. Mary had been an elementary principal at two different schools for a total of eleven years. After a three-year stint as an elementary principal, Cathy had been a junior high assistant principal for one year, and a junior high principal for four years. Elizabeth had been an assistant high school principal for two years and principal at two different high schools for nine years. Theresa had served as an assistant elementary principal one year and as an elementary principal in two different schools for five years. Susan had been a central office coordinator and director for twelve years before becoming a central office division director.

In essence, these women would be deemed successful by most because all had broken through the "glass ceiling" when so many women have not. In education the "glass ceiling" phenomenon seems to contribute to the fact that even though women constitute about 70% of the nation's instructional personnel (Chase and Bell, 1994) only 24% of the administrators in the United States are women (Jones and Montenegro, 1990). According to a 1993 survey by the American Association of School Administrators, only 34.2% of the

nation's principals, 24.3% of the assistant superintendents, and 7.1% of the superintendents are women (Montenegro, 1993).

Furthermore, utilizing the lens previously mentioned, the achievements of these five women would be considered successful whether women or men had accomplished them. The credentials of the five administrators are substantial.

There are, however, further dimensions to the concept of success and this study has attempted to deal with these other facets of success as they emerged from the data obtained. To understand the implications of these other dimensions in the professional lives of the five administrators, we need to become somewhat acquainted with the women. Thus, we will learn what their definition of success is, what they think the characteristics of success are, and how they consider themselves in the light of success. In addition, we will examine the perceptions of five other educators in each district to broaden our understanding of how these others perceive success and its attributes as applied to the work and organizational lives of the five women administrators.

First, in order to provide a frame of reference for the study, the definitions of success of the five central office women administrators were examined. Three of the five women expressed their belief that when an individual is meeting her own professional and personal goals, she has success:

> *My personal...approach to thinking about success would be measured on two scores. One would be a personal level, a personal feeling of success, what is your own personal goal and mission in life and does what you're doing meet that goal and mission (subject #1).*

All five of the women partially defined success in terms of outcomes such as meeting the goals of the district, the goals of a program, or of seeing things happen:

> *And, I think a second way ...would be whether or not when we look at data...do you see that some change is taking place, or there is something, you're getting positive strength in what you've done (subject #1).*

(S)uccess would be the outcomes that we're trying to achieve as a result on a particular project(subject#3).

...I measured success...by actually seeing that things were moving, you know, that people were changing, and that they were accepting new ideas and they were trying new things, and kids were benefiting from it and teachers were benefiting from it. And that always gives me a sense of, "Hey, I've, really, I'm making a difference here." It's the same way in the classroom, I think, you know when you see progress in a child. But I don't know that that is recognized as success by other people (subject #5).

Three of the women elaborated on this definition by focusing on the importance of seeing things happen through people:

You feel successful if you're making a difference, that you have a sense that people feel you're making a difference if you know you're able to nurture people and see growth, if you can help people put pieces together to help others make things happen, if you can teach others and then see them internalize that (subject #2).

I feel good, I feel successful when people start moving in a direction (subject #5).

So I think the people part for me almost measures more success...if people feel like 'Gosh, we are moving in the right direction, we feel good about what we're doing', that has a lot of success for me (subject #3).

Only one of the women mentioned that success lies in what other peoples' perceptions might be.

What about the five people in each district who agreed to share their perceptions of the women administrators? How do these other respondents define success? Most of them have defined it in much the same way as our five women did.

I guess reaching whatever goal it is you've set out in life (female respondent #1, district B).

By fulfillment of your hopes and dreams. Not money, but if you are doing what you feel is a service to others and it just fulfills the hopes and dreams you've had throughout your life (female respondent #2, district B).

Feeling good yourself about what you've done in your whole life and having others view you as a success...Enjoying what you do (male respondent #1, district B).

I think a lot of success is whether or not you like what you do, whether or not you feel you contribute. I really think it has to be more of a personal thing...a sense that (you) had accomplished the task that people had set out for (you) and (you) had set out for (yourself). To be held in esteem by your peers (female respondent #3, district B).

Meeting more goals ...and objectives as effectively and as efficiently as possible to get the job done (male respondent #2, district B).

There were exceptions to the above definitions among the respondents. One respondent referred to a successful person as one who had "attained the level or the type of skill application that they were really good at and chose to stay there" without being enticed by money or prestige (female respondent, district A). This respondent felt that education provides prime examples of the application of the Peter Principle, where people rise above their level of competence. The respondent also thought that this practice weakens a school district. Another unique definition came from a respondent who held that success is meeting or exceeding the clients' expectations (male respondent, district B). This respondent offered that view as the way that success was defined in his school district.

Summing up most of the responses, however, leaves us with three major definitions of success to guide this study:

1) Having a feeling of meeting one's personal life goals and feeling good about what one is doing
2) Seeing outcomes on the job as a result of one's efforts, outcomes which often include how effectively one has influenced people

3) Being held in esteem by others

The definitions of the subjects and other respondents afford us entrée into not only the cognitive focus of the five subjects and the ten respondents in regards to the meaning of success, but they also open a doorway into the culture for success of each district, a topic which we will consider later. In addition, they raise the question of whether or not the definitions of success of each of these people really characterize their perceptions about the success of the five women administrators. Thus, to carry us one step further into the investigation of these matters, we will examine how the five women administrators portray success in general and their own success in particular. We will also look at whether or not the respondents considered the district office women to be successful and the reasons given for their perceptions.

What Are the Characteristics of Success?

Quality is never an accident; it is always the result of high intention, sincere effort, intelligent direction and skillful execution; it represents the wise choice of many alternatives.

Willa A. Foster

The five women administrators' responses were in complete agreement as to two of the characteristics of successful people. First, they believed that being a people person, having good interpersonal skills, and being able to work with people were necessary for those who are to be successful.

I think you have to be a people person because it's a people business. You need to understand what people are saying to you and interpret that and what that means ...(subject #1).

Secondly, they agreed that a successful person empowers people and develops ownership in them, motivating them and moving them toward a vision or goal.

(I think you need to have) the ability to get people to develop structures or processes that have ownership by a greater number of people (subject #3).

...helped people to move in instructional directions that are valuable (subject # 5).

Three of the women district administrators specified that a successful person spends large amounts of time and work on the job. Other characteristics, each one identified by at least two of the women, include: decisive, organized, exhibits leadership by having a vision and planning toward it, sees the whole picture, is committed and enthusiastic, has bottom line values, and has the trust of others.

Primarily, however, it appears that, for these five administrators, the most important characteristics of a successful person have to do with people. All of these women believe that to be effective one must have the ability to work well with people and four of them believe one must have the ability to influence people.

Do the other respondents cite similar characteristics of a successful person? The interview data from the two districts were not as definitive in this respect. However, there seemed to be some agreement on three characteristics that are important for the women district administrators to be considered successful. One of those characteristics is the ability to persuade and move people and to keep them on task. Another is the ability to cause things to happen and get tasks accomplished. The third characteristic identified by at least four of the ten respondents is to be considered credible. The definition of credible differed for each of the four respondents and included: should have secondary as well as elementary building principal experience; should have more than five years building principal experience in the district; should be able to relate to the building level staff; should have been a strong building level administrator; should be "very bright, very capable". Other characteristics showing moderate agreement among respondents were: manages things and is organized; a hard worker and puts in a lot of time and effort; has achieved her own professional goals, possesses good people skills.

This particular data also begins to give us a sense of a distinct difference between the responses from each of the two districts. Although responses indicating the first three characteristics were equally mentioned in both districts, only district B respondents mentioned being organized and being a hard worker as positive characteristics. This difference in responses gives us further insight into each district's culture for success for its district-level women administrators. Generally speaking, responses from district B seemed to dwell more on the skills and positive characteristics of the women administrators than on perceived shortcomings. In district A, it seemed more difficult for the respondents to dwell on the strengths and positive aspects of the women administrators. For example, although there is evidence to suggest that the women in district A are also hard workers, put many hours into the job, and are organized, these characteristics were not mentioned as a factor of success for those women as they were for the women in district B. It seems from this and similar examples in the data that some other factor(s) may be of significance in the perceptions of success applied to the central office women. As we proceeded to analyze the data, it became more and more probable that the culture of each district valued different characteristics for some reason. We became more and more curious to understand what that reason might be.

It appears that the characteristics most esteemed by the women administrators and their colleagues are quite similar. The administrators' emphasis on working well with people and having the ability to influence people ties in directly with the other respondents' beliefs that being able to move people and having credibility are important to success.

In addition, there is a strong link between the definitions of success and the measures the district co-workers used to signal success in these women. The definition "having a feeling of meeting one's personal life goals and feeling good about what one is doing" is supported by the characteristic "has achieved her own professional goals". The statement "seeing outcomes on the job as a result of one's efforts, outcomes which often include how effectively one has influenced people" is reiterated in the desirable

characteristics "to be able to persuade and move people and to keep them on task; to cause things to happen and get tasks accomplished". The third definition of success, "being held in esteem by others" is partially related to the characteristic "to be considered credible".

Are They or Are They Not Successful? That Is the Question

I do the best I know how, the very best I can; and I mean to keep on doing it to the end. If the end brings me out all right, what is said against me will not amount to anything. If the end brings me out all wrong, ten angels swearing I was right would make no difference.

Abraham Lincoln

Do the women consider themselves to be successful in the eyes of others? Generally speaking, all five women believe that others in their respective districts consider them to be successful. However, three of the women used qualifiers such as "by and large", "I believe so", and "some do" in their answers. Although each of the women gave many reasons why they believed others perceived them to be successful, there was very little duplication among those reasons. Indeed, the responses given by each woman appeared to be somewhat indicative of that woman's own practices, skills, and personal and professional belief system.

Although the women believed that others now consider them to be successful, four of them explained that was not true when they first began their central office jobs:

> *When I was as a principal, I felt like I was an accepted part of the group and that important information and knowledge were shared with me .... When I moved into the new central office position, I felt like I lost that sense of belonging in a way.... I had to start over and regain the principals' respect. Some of them really made me earn it! (subject #5).*

Not at first--I had to gain that feeling. Not at first, but now, secondary principals (respect my opinion) as much as the elementary principals...and it wasn't like that in the beginning when I got in this position. (subject #1).

That takes a while to build that (respect) up...There's a little bit of patience...overcome stereotypes in order to...build some trust, and I think sometimes when we switch positions we think what we had before is automatically going to come with it....You have to earn, sometimes re-earn, respect, trust, at the same time that you're gaining new knowledge" (subject #4).

When I ...eventually moved up in this district, there was a long time where it was, I felt, that I was pacified... One of the first few females to be at central office...At that time, when I would stand up at a principal's meeting and talk about setting goals, long-range planning...I think there were people sitting there, "She's not for real. Does she think we're interested in this?"...My goal was that this will happen with time and I was secure enough in my own ego, I guess, to not let this devastate me totally" (subject #3).

Do the other respondents consider the women to be successful? In essence, all five of the women were considered to be successful by all but one of the respondents. However, there were degrees to their perceptions, as discussed in the section which addressed what the respondents considered to be the characteristics of a successful person. It again appears that there is a difference between the collective views of the two districts' respondents. However, we must remember that the ten respondents interviewed may not be representative of the majority view of each district and consider the data in light of that fact.

What Do You Expect From Me?

For men and women are not only themselves; they are also the region in which they were born, the city apartment or the farm in which they learned to walk, the games they played

as children, the old wives' tale they overheard, the food they ate, the schools they attended, the sports they followed, the poems they read, and the God they believed in.

W. Somerset Maugham, The Razor's Edge *(71, p. 2)*

Thus far, we have become familiar with some positive data about five successful women administrators. However, as mentioned previously, success has many ramifications at many different levels, guided by what each person brings to the evaluation of success. What is considered successful for one is sometimes not considered successful in the eyes of another. A highly-regarded characteristic in one person is diminished or considered unimportant in light of other "necessary" characteristics in another person. The remainder of this paper is devoted to an examination of the characteristics of these women that the other respondents did not consider indicative of success. As will be shown, this examination creates somewhat of a paradox for the study. Sometimes the characteristics desired for one woman are resented in another. Certain characteristics are highly valued for women in one situation and seem to have little or no value for women in another situation. As we inspect the behaviors and personality traits that were not highly regarded by the ten colleagues of the women administrators, we also present them in the light of culturally invisible expectations, socialization processes, "culturally mediated" patterns, and possible gender biases or stereotypes which attempt to explain the paradox. We begin this exploration with a metaphor.

Consider the rose. The bloom of the rose can be lovely, enticing, alluring--just as the bloom of success. The bud of the rose matures, the petals separate and fall away, giving to the flower many different forms over time. Success too has many dimensions that are only obvious if one examines it carefully over time. As we behold the roses of success, do we see the effects of a carefully tended garden and cherished blooms, or do we see signs of benevolent neglect, with blemishes where others have carelessly trod? Are there elements of support that can contribute to the success of the woman administrator?

When we gaze upon these roses, do each of us see them in a different light? Is success in the eye of the beholder? Do these blooms look different depending on how they are arrayed in the environment, whether they're with several other roses on the sunny and protected side of the house or growing alone out in the middle of the lawn? Does the position of the woman and the authority endowed in it make a difference in her success? Does the climate and culture of the district affect her success? How the roses are viewed depends on the likes and dislikes of those admiring the roses--whether or not they prefer that color, that type. Are women administrators viewed on the same basis?

There are all kinds of successful women administrators, just as there are all kinds of roses: domesticated, wild, rambling, miniature-- all categorized as roses. Viewers carry their thoughts, conceptions, and preferences about roses with them when they see a rose. We, as researchers and examiners can provide an example. One of us doesn't really care much about roses except when she receives a dozen of them as a culturally-valued gift. The other one thinks roses are beautiful to behold, but cannot abide the scent, either in the live flower nor in candles, etc., an aversion stemming from a traumatic event in her youth. We both have intact our cognitive models of roses, shaped by cultural expectations or developed over years of confirming experiences. We know how we feel about roses. We know how we will react to roses. It would be difficult for us to change that reaction, no matter how different the rose might look or smell. A rose is a rose.

Humans put faith in such cognitive models and this can impede them from accepting new models (Glidewell, 1993). Lakoff (1987) states that some cognitive models are actually subcategories which stand for the category as a whole and that this is a potential source of prototype effects. Thus, we explore in this section of the paper the subcategory of "feminine woman" as a prototype of woman and the subcategory "male administrator" as a prototype of administrator. In essence, we have examined the data for any links between success as an administrator and feminine qualities. We want to know if a woman has to be "feminine" to be perceived as successful in an administrative position.

We want to know if the way she wields power (in a feminine or in a masculine manner) influences how she is viewed by others. We want to find out what qualities are seen as appropriate or inappropriate for the woman central office administrator. We want to know if the two stereotypes (that of woman and how women ought to be and that of administrator and how administrators ought to be) can be combined in a successful manner. Can the rose take on different attributes, i.e. green stripes or blue coloring and still be regarded as lovely?

Although many different gender issues materialized from the data, we examine the preceding questions in the light of three dominant characteristics or behaviors that emerged: being process oriented/being too much so; being too directive/not being directive enough; having a forceful personality/not being forceful enough.

Collaboration, consensus, and "power to"

As noted previously, the espoused theory of all five of the women administrators embraces the concept of using a collaborative and consensus-building process with people in order to get things done. This is, as shown by Brunner (1993), a part of the female definition of power. The women in her study defined power as "power to", or "the ability to empower others to make their own decisions collaboratively and to carry them out through a collective, inclusive model " (Brunner, 1993, p. 190). It appears that "power to" women in positions of authority are more favorably regarded than "power over" women (Jacobs and McClelland, 1994; Brunner and Duncan, 1994). The definition of "power over" is the ability of a person to convince others to do as she wishes through any means possible (Brunner, 1993). All of the women in the present study report that they use the collaborative process, which is the "power to" definition, but four of them use the collaborative process to "get things done", which is the "power over" definition. In fact, only subject #1 had a truly "power to" definition of power.

We delegate to you in a way that it's left to you to do it and I don't have to worry about it and then you have the responsibility and the flexibility to make any decisions you

want to. I don't like the word power, because I think that if you're successful and if you're good, you don't need power (Subject #1).

What effect does the use of consensus and collaboration by the women in our study have on how they're perceived by others in the district? The responses are varied.

Pro - The consensus process is valued by some. It allows all points of view to be heard and engages others in the process.

I respect her skills as a facilitator because she was able to listen to all points of view and allow discussion and keep things on track at the same time, and a lot of things that I personally feel are extremely important for someone in her position that I don't think a lot of people have those abilities (female respondent, district A, about subject #5).

When they present in front of a meeting...and they do have that interactive quality, not saying "here's the decision we made for you", I think that draws in, that pulls power to them. Because they see people, the audience sees people who are asking their opinion and engaging in the process (female respondent, district B, about subjects #3 and #4).

Con - The consensus process takes too long and is inefficient. Decisions aren't made. Males sometimes feel they are not heard.

Let's take the junior high curriculum committee... . It was just endless and it was more of a feel good process than accomplishment process and that's where, again, this is my opinion in that, I'm a real firm believer that if you can get 90% of the problems solved and you can do it efficiently, and you alienate 10%, fine, do it. It's a lot better than getting that extra five percent and spending a year and a half to do it. It's a ridiculous...waste of men and money, but she was very much process and consensus oriented and that makes it slow, makes it really slow...that's because everybody's hand gets in the pot (male respondent, district A, about subject #5).

It just got bogged down in all this procedural stuff and that took far too long. It seemed like her focus or her concerns were unwarranted and that we needed to move on to the matters at hand (female respondent, district A, about subject #5).

And interestingly enough, from my male colleagues that have served on these committees, they voice more often that they're not heard than the women on the committee...And my experience has been that the women committee members who, you know, give their opinions, they feel that everyone's opinion is valued in her (female respondent, district B, about subject #3).

There's two men for instance, in this building, (and) I see the women making decisions, even like curricular decisions, (using a) process I don't understand. They sit and discuss and talk and talk and I'm (thinking), 'Where's the decision' (male respondent, district A, about his female building principal)?

Keeping in mind that we have a very small sample of male and female respondents in each district, we will examine the data above in an attempt to gain some understanding. It appears evident that there are some people, both males and females, who resent the collaborative process as taking too long and avoiding the necessary decision making. There is evidence also that some persons value the consensus process and "come away feeling (they've) been heard" (female respondent, district B). There is also a suggestion that men involved in such a sharing and collaborative process, particularly if they are in the minority in the group, come away feeling they have not been heard.

The power discussion becomes a factor as we analyze the data. Both the man and the woman in district A who found fault with subject #5 (and with a woman principal) for taking too much time in process defined power as "power over" and equated forcefulness and decisiveness with power and success. Neither of these respondents saw subject #5 as particularly successful in "getting things done, at least efficiently". Conversely, the woman in district A who supported the consensus process used by subject #5 defined power as "power to" and praised the facilitative approach of subject #5.

Tannen (1993), who has studied the language and behavior patterns of women and men in the workplace, explains that our behavior in meetings is regulated by the manner in which we have been socialized to participate. According to her, in meetings where there are both men and women, there is often an inclination for men to speak more often and to speak longer. Many men also have a tendency to use a more assertive tone, speak in a declamatory way and with apparent certainty. Some women speak forcefully as well, but generally the consequences for them are different than for men. These women will often be sanctioned for being "too aggressive". Many women, on the other hand, seek permission to speak, adopt a conciliatory tone, use tentative or personal language, and speak less than half as long and half as often as men, often affirming the men.

Our study bears out Tannen's findings. Women, who are not generally accustomed to being heard in meeting situations, respond well to a climate where they are heard and their opinions are considered valuable. If the facilitator of the meeting is not forcing her opinions on the group and is making sure that everyone has ample and equal time to express her opinions, then those who do not generally speak up will be able to do so. On the other hand, those who are habituated to speaking up and perhaps even dominating, may resent the process oriented meetings because it may seem to them that they are not getting enough time to speak. In fact, Tannen's (1993) research indicates that both women and men would like to have more time to speak in meeting settings.

What are the implications for a woman administrator in central office? Our data suggests that the collaborative, consensus-building process is valued by most of the respondents in both districts. This process was most successful when used by subject #1 who is a "power-to" woman. The fact that, for the other four women, the consensus process was motivated by "power over" reasons, i.e. to influence others or to get the job done, may affect how those women are perceived when using the consensus-building process. The other four women were at times viewed with frustration or resentment when attempting to use collaboration. The frustration arose from the woman administrators

taking too much time, talking too much; the resentment from having her mind already made up; or from being over-bearing. There are of course other characteristics that need to be addressed before considering final implications. The analysis of these further characteristics follows.

Direction, decisiveness and getting things done

The women administrators as well as the respondents in the districts placed importance on seeing outcomes on the job as a result of one's efforts, outcomes which often include how effectively one has influenced people. As we analyzed the data, it became evident that the respondents in the districts had varying ways of looking at the way the women made decisions, gave directions, and "got things done". In general, the respondents in district A felt that the women administrators were relatively powerless and did not seem to accomplish much:

> *Take somebody who's powerful and the comments are "I hate that jerk", or "I can't believe what she's accomplishing"...All the comments I ever heard about (the women administrators) were all middle of the curve. Don't really alienate anybody. (Don't really get much done.) (male respondent #2, district A, about subjects #2 and #5).*
>
> *I don't feel as though they have done anything concrete enough to warrant being considered powerful people . ...I don't know that I can say that I've ever seen them actually take a stand on anything (female respondent #2, district A, about subjects #2 and #5).*

In district B, respondents generally felt as if the women administrators were powerful and were accomplishing a great deal. There is, however, in both districts, some disagreement as to just how directive and decisive the women should be.

> **Pro - Central office administrators should be decisive and direct.**
>
> *There are times when central office people have to, after they have taken input from lots of different people, make a decision, realizing it's not going to make everybody*

happy, and move on. The more times you can do that by consensus than by vote ...the better you are...(but)...her effectiveness was open to question, I guess. And part of that was, my perception was, a difficult time making decisions (male respondent #1, district A, about subject #5).

Her personal style was that she doesn't direct. She gets consensus on everything. ...There was never any clear cut direction...it was also a strange relationship from the very beginning in that I went through the interview process. She never told me that she was going to be--you know, "I'm going to be your supervisor", that never even came up (male respondent #2, district A, about subject #5).

We still are part of USD #000 and, for example, with (the state program), I think there needs to be more direction from the central office, not less (male respondent #1, district A), about subject #2).

(I)f you have someone who can lead by example, who can persuade, can educate, can direct, then I think their power...just grows exponentially (female respondent #3, district B, about subjects #1, #3, and #4).

I think you can make or break your own position, I mean you can sit back and wait for things to come to you or you can, as the saying goes, take the bull by the horn and be aggressive and really tackle things (female respondent #2, district A, about subjects #2 and #5).

We can't be successful without influencing other people...you have to be directive to a point. ...I'll just reiterate with X. She is a tremendous influence in the committees...it's a real feeling of her being in charge and being directive and saying, "Here are some goals that we have, and here's how I would like to set about meeting those goals" (female respondent #2, district B, about subject #3).

Con - Directives don't allow the opinions of others to be represented. Dictating is not admired. Women who fall back to an

authoritative position are overcompensating. Women do that more often than men.

She seems to have a clear vision of what she would like to accomplish...and I think she's pursuing that, organizing others in a to-accomplish-this vision that she has. And, although sometimes we don't always agree with her, I feel that she has clearly thought out and pursues this. ...This is petty, ...but her directives to the teachers about X, I disagree with that. And I vehemently, there's some things that she, you know, I vehemently disagree with these. ...It was perceived by those around her that had worked on this...they really felt like their opinions were not represented (female respondent #2, district B, about subject #3).

I see her as kind of having people involved in it as opposed to dictating. So for that part of it I would say that she was successful (female respondent #3, district A, about subject #5).

I see...these women fall back to a power position quicker than men. I'm not sure why...I think they find themselves trying to in a way overcompensate or "We are in this position. We are trying to exert this influence and we have to do this sometimes by being a little more authoritative"...I'm just thinking that I see that as a characteristic or as a behavior sometimes. ...If I look at principals I would say the same thing. The women principals tend to revert back to a power position or a position of authority quicker than men. And I'm not sure why (male respondent #2, district B, about subjects #1 and #3).

It is perceived by some of the respondents that men in the same positions could more easily have been directive and decisive without some of the negative observations mentionedpreviously:

Criticisms about we always do it her way, in the end...I think people ...would be quicker to criticize women for that than they would a man...If I did the same thing

that X did in a situation...they would accept it better from me than they would her (male respondent #2, district B, about subject #3).

A man would probably do the same thing. He would have a vision, he would have objectives, he would have his committee in order to attain those objectives, and have input. I think they're perceived differently because they're women (female respondent #2, district B, about subjects #3 and #4).

A woman's unobtrusive style can deny her recognition of what she has accomplished. If she has worked in a collaborative manner with other persons and doesn't take credit for her work, referring to the fact that "we did this" instead of "I am responsible for this", then others don't realize what has happened and won't give her credit for it (Tannen, 1993). A woman who feels as if she is doing great things needs to make sure that others know about it. Formal and informal procedures for letting others know what she is doing should be set up and regularly carried out. Women administrators should network with those in power, i.e. the superintendent and the principals, to let them know the results of their projects or their work. In district B, the central office women administrators give an update on everything they are working on at each administrative and principals' meeting.

In general, people are inclined to admire those who appear decisive and who seem to get things done. Most people also tend to expect these characteristics from those in positions of authority, although they do not like supervisors who are too directive or who make decisions for others without taking their opinion into account. The double bind for women administrators exists because they are also held to a standard of femininity that expects them to be gentle, unobtrusive, non-aggressive, humble, indirect, inclusive, and to hedge their beliefs as opinions (Tannen, 1993). In short, women managers are generally not expected to act like authority figures. Therefore, pressed by a double standard, women must appear decisive and competent without appearing to force her own vision and to already have her mind made up. She must also allow others opportunity for input and their

own decision-making without appearing indecisive and non-directive. This is particularly difficult since everything a person says becomes evidence of her competence or lack of it. Therefore, anyone who appears to need help making decisions by allowing for input from others can be judged negatively (Tannen, 1993).

In short, the ways a woman is expected to talk may result in her being seen as lacking in authority. "But if she talks with certainty, makes bold statements of fact rather than hedged statements of opinion, interrupts others, goes on at length, and speaks in a declamatory and aggressive manner, she will be disliked" (Tannen, 1993, p. 170). Even the "power-to" woman in our study was regarded by at least one respondent as becoming too authoritative and too directive at times.

Forcefulness, aggressiveness and relationships

The five women administrators were in complete agreement as to the need for being a people person, having good interpersonal skills, and being able to work with people. They believed these "people" skills were necessary for those who are to be successful. How are their beliefs carried out in their work with others in their districts? How are their "people" skills perceived by those who work with them? Are these perceptions also shaped by the fact that these five administrators are women and are judged by feminine standards as well as administrative standards?

One of the things that is readily evident from our data is that people react well to women in positions of authority when they perceive them as being easy to relate to:

> *They don't appear to be higher, better, than you are, where I think a man sometimes does. ...They're very personable. They don't appear to be the type of people that think that they are the powerful ones and you're supposed to...I don't think they feel like they're above us (female respondent #1, district B, about subjects #1, #3, and #4).*

I see X as somebody who seems to be more calm in her approach to people...I felt comfortable just to talk personally to X (female respondent #3, district A, about subject #5).

But what about when women are seen as forceful and aggressive? Is this an accepted trait for women administrators?

Pro - Women can be aggressive and be in charge without being overbearing and offensive. They can earn respect and do their job well with a kind of quiet authority.

I think it's possible for a female to be aggressive without being overbearing and you know you can channel your energies, you can be effective with people and still not turn people off. I think X (a female principal) is aggressive in going after what she wants for her kids...but at the same time, I don't see her as coming across and being rude or offensive to people (female respondent #2, district A, about subject #2).

This is another thing by virtue of the fact that we are women. Men tend to think women who are in charge are barracudas, you know what I mean? They're too aggressive, they're offensive, and I think women can be in charge without having that persona of being this...aggressive. I think you can earn respect and do your job well with kind of a quiet authority (female respondent #2, district B).

Con - Women administrators who have pushed to "get there" can be perceived as overaggressive, overemotional, or simply irritating. Women who are aggressive can appear to be short on people skills and are sometimes called things like "barracuda" or "controlling mother figure" or worse. Women sometimes appear to be proving they are the authority.

You have a woman who has a goal to be a district level administrator, she has to push to get there. But by pushing she is perceived as being overaggressive,

overemotional, all of those characteristics that were holding her back in the first place, so it's kind of a rolling thing (female respondent #1, district A).

The thing she has not succeeded in, I think that her persona is one of real aggressive and not always taking into consideration the people she works with ...I would say that they are both a little bit short on people skills in being able to relate with staff in a way that leads staff to feel that they have input and that their input is taken seriously and that their input is handled objectively and professionally (female respondent #1, district A, about subjects #2 and #5).

She tends to, at first, I think, appear to be that aggressive, barracuda woman (female respondent #2, district B, about subject #3).

Well, she's one of those people that comes across as a very controlling mother figure. ...I also have felt very inadequate around her. ...But I see her trying to develop skills too. I mean I see her starting to use skills that I know are not easy for her, don't come easily, so I respect her for that (female respondent #3, district A, about subject #2).

She just can't have a normal conversation with a group of people I guess is how I perceive her. She's got to mention somebody from the state department or some group that's getting together or some law that has to be addressed or whatever. To me, it's maybe kind of like with X . Cut through the crap, let's get to what we need to do...There's something about her that gets on people's nerves... I mean there's just something irritating (female respondent #2, district A, about subject #2).

I have seen in the women power over behavior and I don't like it. But then again I don't like it in men (female respondent #3, district B, about subjects #3 and #4).

You don't have to hit them over the head to convince them you're in charge. Women tend to want to prove they're the authority more than men. Probably have

had to do toe-to-toe...What people do speaks a lot louder than how they act (male respondent #2, district B, about several women administrators in the district).

It appears that even though the respondents generally do not respond well to what they perceive as forceful or aggressive language or behavior in the women administrators, they are also aware that there are quite stringent expectations for women in this area, perhaps more so than for men.

I have heard many elementary teachers say over the many years I've been doing this, "I never want to work for a female principal", you know, and I've never pursued that to say "Why"? (male respondent #1, district A).

I think women administrators in general have a tougher road because of erroneous stereotyping....If a male administrator gets angry at a meeting whether the group as a whole agrees with him or not they assess his anger as reactionary to what has happened right then. If a female administrator looses her cool at a meeting, it's because she's a woman, and so because of that I think women administrators have a harder time (female respondent #1, district A).

I just have a feeling that if you went out and asked all our principals who you'd like to work for at the district level, men or women? I have a hunch they'd say men...And I'm talking about men ***and*** *women principals...I think it's perception still, and a lot of people think that you're going to have more difficulty with a female than you are with a man (male respondent #2, district B).*

It would be interesting to me if men are more able to establish a role and maintain that role, and if women find themselves playing different roles (female respondent #3, district B).

Many women avoid being as aggressive as some men may be. Those who do speak and act assertively may get more negative responses than men who speak in similar ways (Tannen, 1993). When a woman is in a high position, there is an expectation that she will be abrasive, unfeminine, or bossy. To combat this expectation, women managers often

claim that their management style is not authoritarian. In fact, some women try to be extra nice when they're in a position of authority, trying to assure others that they are not throwing their weight around (Tannen, 1993). The women in our study are no different. Having learned as little girls that sounding too sure of themselves will cause peers to penalize and even ostracize them, women administrators may try to speak in styles that are non-assertive and non-forceful to avoid being unliked. Those women who are unsuccessful in speaking and acting in an acceptably feminine style and choose instead to speak and act in a forceful, administrative manner may attract labels like "barracuda woman" and "controlling mother figure". Simply being a male in a position of authority alone does not invoke such stereotypes (Tannen, 1993). In our study, all five women were perceived as being either too forceful, too aggressive, or lacking in personal relationship skills. Although generally speaking, "power to" women are not regarded as authoritative and are liked by others, even the "power to" woman in our study was included in a discussion about women administrators having a tendency to prove they were in positions of authority by coming on too strong.

What are the implications for those women who are in central office positions or wish to be? Obviously, they once again have a narrow path to follow. In order to be perceived as successful, they must be quietly authoritative without being perceived as bossy. They must be tastefully assertive without being aggressive. They should seek personal skills which allow them to build positive relationships. These characteristics are desirable for men as well as for women, but the lack of these qualities in women is much more noticeable than in men.

And what of women who don't want to change their characteristics, who like who they are, who don't want to take on "many roles"? Is there no hope for them? Actually, there was a bit more data that emerged from our study that is extremely encouraging for those women who may be "power over" women, aggressive, forceful, slow to come to decisions, indirect in their requests (orders) of subordinates, or who have any other traits

not regularly associated with "feminine" or "administrative" standards, especially when these standards are applied to a single person in the combined role of being a "woman administrator". One of the factors that lends encouragement to the situation is that the "good ole boy" network is dying out in many school districts. In district B, where every respondent asserted that the network was gone or on its last legs, the women central office administrators are quite positively regarded in spite of characteristics that were not highly regarded. These characteristics are not ignored, but they do seem to be somewhat overlooked. Granted, there are undercurrents of resentment and dislike, even negative labeling, but these women are, nevertheless, regarded as bright, competent, hardworking, organized, and productive. They also appeared to be happy in their jobs and seemed to feel valued and powerful. This leads us directly to at least one other strong factor that can make a difference for women administrators--that of the climate of the district.

Summative Propositions: Community, Climate, Organizational Support

It was a great puzzle to us as we collected the data and began to analyze it, as to why the women administrators in one district seemed to be thriving in many senses of the word and the women in the other district seemed to be struggling to prosper. We were especially perplexed in light of the extraordinary similarities of the districts and the communities as noted previously. Additionally, we thought we knew that the capabilities, experience, and personalities of the women in the two districts were quite similar. Others might consider this an assumption. However, it is an assumption which provides the backdrop for the final section of this paper. We continued to ponder this enigma as we analyzed the data and reflected on its meaning. With sufficient reflection, it became clear to us that there were indeed definite differences in the environments of the districts and that these differences probably contributed to the differences in how the success of the women administrators was perceived in the two districts. This section will contain a summary of our findings regarding favorable conditions for women central office administrators. We

have chosen to present our interpretations and their implications for women administrators as propositional learnings.

Proposition One

Women central office administrators are more likely to thrive in those communities where the traditional power structure has been diffused.

A recent study indicated that a community which selects a woman as superintendent has specific characteristics (Brunner, 1993). It is our observation that those same characteristics also contribute to the acceptance of other women administrators in central office. The community is in transition and growing rapidly, bringing in a large number of people who are open to change and circumstances which may not be the norm for the community. They even bring new ideas with them. Since the community is relatively small and close to the larger metropolitan area, it becomes a "bedroom community" for the larger city. This new group of residents consists of educated middle to upper middle class people who are more sophisticated, modern, and tolerant in their attitudes toward deviation from the "norm" (Brunner, 1993). Such a community composition would certainly seem to support a departure from the traditional male hierarchy in the district's central office. The community in which District B exists is such a community. District A is a more traditional community where influx and growth has been slower and has not yet reached critical mass.

Proposition Two

Upper-echelon women administrators are more likely to be accepted in those districts where the superintendent delegates full organizational power to the women.

The superintendent in district B placed the women in very powerful positions. The executive director of human resources hires all certified personnel, thus enabling her to hire people who are like her, which further dissipates the traditional "old boy"/"old girl" network in the district. The executive director of education and technology not only supervises and evaluates principals, but is also in charge of technology, an area in which a

lot of people have great needs. Her expertise in this area combined with the resources which she alone can dole out, give her a lot of power with people in the district. The assistant superintendent also supervises principals and is in charge of still another area in which people have great need of her expertise and resources. She was selected for one of the two assistant superintendent positions in spite of the fact that another very capable male central office administrator was available (although his expertise did not lie in the area of curriculum and instruction and hers did). All three women report directly to the superintendent which is another source of power.

The superintendent has chosen to give away a great deal of his power to these women. Respondents indicated that, in fact, the women speak for the superintendent and have been known to make suggestions to him or give contrary opinions (a female trait according to Shakeshaft, 1993) to his statements in public meetings. Additionally, it is now a part of district lore that one does not "go around" the women in order to discuss an issue with the superintendent. He has made it clear that if an issue falls within the women's authority, they are the ones to handle it and he refers back to the women anyone who comes directly to him. It is common knowledge that a person will not get what he wants if he doesn't have the appropriate woman central office administrator in his corner.

The women in district A do not have powerful, autonomous positions. They do not supervise principals. Although they were selected over male candidates and they do report directly to the superintendent, others commonly circumvent them and go directly to the superintendent about issues belonging in their domain. Their resources are somewhat limited, but the most serious limitation is that of not being able to speak completely for their area. It appears to others that they are not autonomous and have to report back to someone, and that they must secure permission to make certain decisions. It is perceived that they do not speak for the superintendent. It seems to be common in district B that when one of the women central office administrators speak, those within hearing had better do as bidden.

In district A, on the other hand, the women are somewhat questioned and have had to work hard to build personal authority with others in the district.

Proposition Three

Women have a greater chance to be perceived as successful in a district where a highly-regarded superintendent has endowed the women with symbolic power.

The collaborative, consensus-building style, which was noted previously as being a "feminine" or "power to" style is strongly supported by the superintendent and his cabinet in District A. All principals in the district are expected to subscribe to this style and at least one principal has been chastised for not using that style. The superintendent has been in the district most of his career as a teacher, principal, and district-level administrator before moving into the superintendency. He is regarded as very knowledgeable about the district. People also consider him to be fair and caring. He is considered to be unique as he delegates power to others and deals with them in a consensual manner. He is held in high regard both by virtue of his position as superintendent and because of his experience and reputation in the district; therefore, his support of the same style which the women use gives strong symbolic strength to their endeavors.

Another source of symbolic power for two of the women is the strong emphasis placed on teaching and learning. Reorganizing so as to create an assistant superintendent position in curriculum and instruction gives teaching and learning a strong emphasis. The woman in that position is responsible for pre-Kindergarten through 12, special education, and staff development, as well as assessment, school improvement and accreditation. The executive director of education and technology benefits from this emphasis on teaching and learning as well. Where the superintendent places his highest positions sends strong messages about what he values. It is obvious to the women and to the rest of the district that he values these three women and the positions they fill.

Another factor lending symbolic power to the women is the attitudes that others in the district have in regards to gender issues. It appeared that the two male respondents in

district B were well informed about female and male behavior and how it differed and what the implications were for female administrators. One of the males has read Tannen's books and even gives advice to a female mentee based on this literature. Schmuck (1995) says that if the teachers and administrators in a district do not have the language to see inequality, then they will not see it. She states that having a language helps construct how we see the world. She continues by saying that it requires learning how to see to make aware what is unaware. All five of the respondents in District B, including the two males, were conversant in gender issues and aware of the implications for females. The males and one female in District A, even when encouraged by the questioning of the researcher, did not see their observations in terms of gender issues. They did not seem to have the same awareness and language of the respondents in District B.

Final Thoughts

We started this study wanting to understand more about the behaviors and characteristics of women central office administrators that contribute to their being perceived as successful. We found, despite the strong assertions of the five women subjects that no real differences exist between the successful administrative behavior of women and men, that indeed such socialized differences do seem to exist. We admired the strength and insight of the women as they professed that it was wise to ignore such differences and proceed with doing the best job possible. We rose with them above the seemingly unfair expectations and stereotyping. We finish this study by expressing the hope that the modern woman administrator, who is a blur of activity, pressured to be all things to all people (Estés, 1992), will be able to be true to herself. As more and more women, each with her own unique style, take positions as district-level administrators, we hope that each woman will be free to be more like herself.

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